

**Remarks on Tornado Response and Recovery Efforts in Rolling Fork, Mississippi**  
*March 31, 2023*

*The President.* Governor, thank you very much. You know, when I heard about the devastation here at Rolling Fork, the first thing that came to mind was, "I've got to get a hold of Bennie Thompson." It's his district, and he treats it like his home. He's been a steadfast leader in every crisis I've worked with him on, and he's always there for his constituents. And he's been a great partner of mine.

And the Governor is right. The Governor—I tried him earlier, but he was already out on the road. I couldn't get him right away. And to let him know that—I made it clear that we'll do everything—everything that's legally within my power to do—to be of assistance to the people in this community.

And, Mayor Walker, I know this has been especially hard for you since you're not only the mayor, but you're also—and I mean this sincerely—the funeral director. It's been tough. You've had to prepare people to be buried who you were with, know well.

And thanks to Sharkey County officials and local officials and first responders and community members who have worked around the clock to rescue survivors. They get people to safety and sort through the wreckage.

But Jill and I are here to show our support. Unfortunately, I've been to too many sites like this over the last 2 years around the country; I've—probably with the FEMA director—better part of 12 to 15. And I always see the same thing in America: When the neighborhood's in trouble, the whole neighborhood comes to help.

Walking down the street here, being told by people—"The reason we were able to get through it," one family told me, "when, finally, the roof came off the house, we were under the bed, we came back down, and all of a sudden it was quiet, and before I knew it, the Red Cross was out front. Before I knew it"—and went on to talk about the neighbors that helped.

And, folks, I know there's a lot of pain and that it's hard to believe that at a moment like this, this community is going to be rebuilt, and rebuilt and built back better than it was before. The resilience of this community has been remarkable. And I just want you to know, as you fight through this, you're not alone. The American people will be with you. They'll help you through it, and so will I.

Multiple tornadoes are—tore through Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee last Friday night. The most powerful came through Rolling Fork. It stayed here just a little over 3 minutes. Just imagine. Look it, I mean, I know those of you who have been through it know. Three minutes. Three minutes, this neighborhood is basically gone. The stores, everything—gone.

And the most powerful part of the tornado came through Rolling Fork. It stayed here and had the effect—it was so devastating. Unless you physically saw it, it's hard to believe. Thirteen lives lost. I met a number of the families earlier today, Jill and I—my wife and I.

Three hundred homes and businesses that are nothing more than piles of twisted materials mixed up with personal items that mattered so much: teddy bears, family albums, clothes, dishes. The basics of life, all gone.

People are still going through the rubble, seeing if they can find that picture of grandmom or that wedding ring that was on the bureau or that special memento that means so—meant so much to them. They get lost too.

Some of this dysfunction and destruction that you're seeing here is going to take years to recover and rebuild, but we're starting now.

When I spoke to the Governor, he said what he needed most was a Federal disaster declaration so that, the earliest hours of Sunday morning, I signed that expedited major disaster Declaration, which gave you more access to more Federal resources. With that declaration, we're providing funding to cover overtime for local emergency responders to cover the cost of removing all debris—100 percent of that cost.

We're also authorizing cash grants for people who lost their homes, whether they own or rent, to pay for things that may not be covered by insurance, like temporary housing, home repairs for those who have homes still standing, or to replace lost personal property, like furniture and appliances and vehicles.

You know, after talking to Bennie and your Governor, today I authorized the Federal Government to cover 100 percent of the cost for removing debris and emergency measures that are involved in keeping up here, like keeping shelters up and running, and paying for every—overtime for everyone—100 percent of the cost—not for the State, but for us—for 30 days. And then, after that, we're not leaving either.

In the midst of all you're dealing with, I know that it's overwhelming. You figure out—got to figure out how we can help, what you need.

That's why right now we have 300 Federal personnel on the ground, including FEMA's Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams to ensure a well-coordinated response to get you the assistance you need. We're walking through damaged neighborhoods to find people in need and help them—they're—they're walking through now—going on, if there's any doors to knock on or people standing there, just to find out where everyone in that house was or is.

We're trying to make it as easy as possible. So, on Monday, the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center will be opening four—in four counties, including this one, so we'll be able to walk in to a situation, explain your circumstance, let people know what you need, and learn more about how you can get the help as quickly as possible.

*Audience member.* [Inaudible]

*The President.* You can't hear me? Oh, you're talking to somebody else, I'm sorry.  
[Laughter]

*The President.* Look, you know, you can also apply for assistance for FEMA online. On—the online is [disasterassistance.gov](https://disasterassistance.gov). Or call 1-800-621-3362; 1-800-621-3362. Already, 1,700 people—one thousand seven hundred people—have signed up for help.

In addition, the Department of Agriculture has made sure families qualifying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—so-called SNAP program—can use these benefits for meals in grocery stores, gas stations, convenience stores, the dollar store, and other vehicles. You can use that SNAP money—and those SNAP material to get meals you need.

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fud is here—Fudge is here, and FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell—Criswell is here, because we're bringing every element of the Federal Government together to help with the immediate needs and long-term rebuilding.

For example, the Department of Agriculture is identifying temporary housing, reimbursing farmers and livestock owners for lost crops and lost livestock. The Small Business Administration

is here, helping businesses get low-interest loans to recover and to rebuild. And if you don't have insurance or you're underinsured, FEMA can help you get started by funding your home repairs, replacing some lost and damaged property, like cars and refrigerators.

I know how important it is for the post office, is all—to many of you—in every community. It's where most people get their prescriptions these days. Well, we're working to make sure you can still have access to them. The—we—what we're doing is, the national Postal Service is going to set up temporary post office, which you've already seen, on the grounds of the present post office, which is not useable.

I also want to note that some of these communities are again facing the threat of severe weather in just 1 week later, if you've looked at the weather forecast. FEMA and other Federal personnel are here on the ground, ready to respond and to support State and local officials if, in fact, they do amount to major storms. I want to urge everyone here to listen to local officials and be prepared to take shelter. And we'll go—got to—you've got to go through this together again, if it happens.

And let me close with this message to the people of Rolling Fork and Amory and Silver City and Carrollton and Winona and that—other communities that have been hit. We're not just here for today. I'm determined that we're going to leave nothing behind. We're going to get it done for you. That's why I'm here, why your Congress are here, why the Governor is here.

We're focused on—now on making sure you've got the place to sleep, food to eat, helping you rebuild your lives in Rolling Stone [Fork; White House correction]. But long term, I know this is your community. This is where you built your lives. And we're going to make sure you can stay right here.

There's nothing we can do to heal the hole in your hearts left by the 13 people who passed, many of whom I met their families: Melissa Price [Pierce; White House correction], Lonnie Price [Pierce; White House correction], Mary Bush. Doris [Deloris; White House correction] Harris, David Moore, Phyllis Maxey, Daryl—excuse me—Daryl Purvis, Linda Herman, Erica Moore, Brenda Odoms, April Johnson, Lavette [Lavetta; White House correction] Herman, and Wendy [Wanda; White house correction] Kelly.

As I've told some of the survivors, we all have had experiences—not the same, but getting that sudden experience you've lost someone is devastating. It's absolutely devastating. And we kind of understand it.

But I've heard incredible stories about the spirit of these families and the resilience and your bravery. The town of Rolling Stone [Fork; White House correction] will be back, and we'll be with you every step of the way.

*Audience member.* Rolling Fork.

*The President.* And I—Roll—what did I say? I didn't—I said "Rolling Fork." "Rolling Stone." I've got my mind going here. [*Laughter*]

We'll be back. And we'll be with you every step of the way.

So God bless you all, and God bless our first responders. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:48 p.m. outside a former animal shelter and auto parts store that were destroyed in the tornado. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tate Reeves of Mississippi; and Mayor Eldridge Walker of Rolling Fork, MS.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Mississippi, tornado damage and recovery efforts.

*Locations:* Rolling Fork, MS.

*Names:* Biden, Jill T.; Bush, Mary Barfield; Criswell, Deanne Bennett; Fudge, Marcia L.; Harris, Delores; Herman, Linda; Herman, Luvella; Johnson, April; Kelly, Wanda; Maxey, Phyllis; Moore, David; Moore, Erica "Nikki"; Odoms, Brenda; Pierce, L.A. "Lonnie"; Pierce, Melissa; Purvis, Daryl F.; Reeves, Tate; Thompson, Bennie G.; Walker, Eldridge.

*Subjects:* Alabama, tornado damage and recovery efforts; Federal Emergency Management Administration; Mississippi, Governor; Mississippi, President's visit; Mississippi, tornado deaths; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Small businesses, low-interest loans; Tennessee, tornado damage and recovery efforts.

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